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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the critical role of parent involvement for the success of their children in school, this report presents statistics which focus on various areas in which parents and schools can work together to develop partnerships. The report presents data collected from a survey of 810 public elementary schools serving kindergarten through grade 8. Results were weighted to produce national estimates of all public schools serving these grades. Data were collected on several kinds of activities which public elementary schools sponsor to encourage parent involvement, the amount of parent participation in those activities, and the extent to which parent input is considered in decisionmaking related to school issues. This report discusses results of school-sponsored activities to inform and involve parents, including: (1) "Parent Attendance at School Events"; (2) "Parent Attendance by School Characteristics"; (3) "Parent Participation in School Decisionmaking"; and (4) "Parent Input Through School Councils." The Brief concludes with a summary of findings and a section of technical notes describing how the survey was conducted. Includes five tables of descriptive statistics. (AMC)

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Parents and Schools: Partners in Student Learning

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Education reform is a major challenge facing schools across the Nation today. Although schools play the key role in the national effort to improve the education of our children, they cannot accomplish it alone. Studies show that the extent to which children are ready to learn and to achieve in school depends also on support from families, with greater family involvement in children's learning identified as a critical link to achieving a high-quality education in a safe, disciplined, learning environment (U.S. Department of Education 1994). In recognition of the significant and essential role of parents in their children's education, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act included an eighth goal that calls upon schools to promote partnerships that will increase parent involvement.

Research has focused on various areas in which parents and schools can work together to develop partnerships. The Executive Summary of the National Education Goals Report suggests that these areas include parenting, communicating, volunteering, supporting student academics at home, and decisionmaking (National Educational Goals Panel 1995). To gather related information, the *Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8* was conducted in spring 1996 for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) through its Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). Data were collected from 810 public elementary schools serving grades kindergarten through eight, and were weighted to produce national estimates of all public schools serving these grades.

This report presents data from the survey on several kinds of activities public elementary schools sponsor to encourage parent involvement, the amount of parent participation in those activities, and the extent to which parent input is considered in decisionmaking related to school issues.

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School-Sponsored Activities to Inform and Involve Parents

Overall, during the 1995-96 school year the majority of public elementary schools held activities intended to encourage parent involvement (table 1). Ninety-seven percent of all schools reported holding an open house or back-to-school night, and 92 percent scheduled schoolwide parent-teacher conferences. School programs designed to portray the curriculum in action by displaying students' work, such as arts performances, sports events, and science fairs, were also held by over 80 percent of all schools. There was little variability among schools when these data were examined by various school characteristics.

Parent Attendance at School Events

Although schools almost universally reported sponsoring various programs open to parents, parents did not attend these events at the same rate at which they were made available. School events that feature some interaction with students' teachers appear to attract more parents than those that exhibit student performances or demonstrations. Schools reported that parents were more likely to attend conferences with their children's teachers than any other type of school event open to parents (table 1). Over half (57 percent) of all public elementary schools indicated that "most or all" parents attended regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences held in 1995-96; 49 percent reported this same high rate of attendance at an open house or back-to-school night. In contrast, only about one-third of all schools reported that most or all parents attended arts events in which their children participated, and even fewer schools reported high levels of parent attendance at sports events (12 percent) or academic events, such as science fairs (19 percent), when their children participated in these events. About one-quarter of schools indicated that "about half" of parents attended sports and academic events, while one-third to one-half of schools reported that "less than half" or "few" parents were in attendance.

Table 1.--Percent of public elementary schools (K-8) indicating that various kinds of activities were held during 1995-96, and their estimates of the typical parent attendance for each type of activity: 1996

Type of activity	All schools		Typical parent attendance[1]									
			Most or all		More than half		About half		Less than half		Few	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Open house or back-to-school night	97	0.8	49	1.9	31	1.6	13	1.4	6	0.9	1	0.4
Regularly-scheduled schoolwide parent-teacher conferences	92	1.2	57	2.1	21	1.9	11	1.3	9	1.1	3	0.6
Arts events such as plays or dance or musical performances	96	0.8	36	2.1	30	2.0	16	1.6	13	1.3	5	0.9
Sports events such as field days or other athletic demonstrations or events	85	1.5	12	1.4	21	2.6	20	2.0	30	2.1	17	1.9
Science fairs or other academic demonstrations or events	84	1.8	19	1.6	24	2.4	20	2.1	23	2.1	14	1.6

[1]Percents in these columns are based on the percent of estimated schools that reported holding each type of event in 1995-96.

NOTE: s.e. is standard error. Because of rounding, percents may not add to 100.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8," FRSS 58, 1996.

Parent Attendance by School Characteristics. Parent attendance at school-sponsored events also showed significant variations across certain school characteristics (table 2). One unexpected finding was that schools in the Southeast had considerably lower rates of parent attendance at teacher conferences, open houses, and arts events than schools in other geographic regions. Significantly fewer schools in this region reported that "most or all" parents typically attended these events. Regional differences in parent presence at sports events and academic demonstrations were less notable, with relatively few schools reporting high levels of attendance at such events.

Table 2.--Percent of public elementary schools (K-8) indicating that "most or all" parents typically attended various kinds of activities[1] held in 1995-96, by school characteristics: 1996

School characteristic	Open house or back-to school night		Parent teacher conferences		Arts events		Sports events or field days		Science fairs or academic demonstration	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
All public elementary schools	49	1.9	57	2.1	36	2.1	12	1.4	19	1.6
Size of enrollment										
Less than 300	58	5.1	65	5.5	43	5.4	16	3.8	25	5.1
300-599	46	3.1	56	2.9	33	2.6	13	2.4	18	2.7
600 or more	44	3.3	51	3.0	34	3.1	6	2.0	16	2.6
Metropolitan status										
City	42	3.2	48	3.8	27	3.7	12	3.0	12	2.8
Urban fringe	53	3.4	62	3.5	40	3.9	9	2.5	19	3.7
Town	48	4.1	63	4.5	39	3.9	12	3.2	22	3.9
Rural	52	4.3	55	4.8	37	4.4	15	3.5	23	3.9
Geographic region										
Northeast	67	4.4	68	3.9	36	4.4	9	2.9	21	4.3
Southeast	25	3.4	20	4.0	20	3.6	6	2.1	10	2.5
Central	57	4.2	70	4.4	48	4.0	18	3.5	27	4.1
West	46	3.7	61	3.7	36	4.8	12	3.1	17	3.3
Percent minority enrollment in school										
Less than 5	63	4.3	66	4.6	47	4.8	21	3.3	27	3.7
5-19	58	4.4	70	4.5	41	5.3	13	3.3	31	4.3
20-49	38	4.6	50	4.2	35	3.9	6	2.2	11	3.2
50 or more	30	3.2	37	3.6	17	2.5	5	1.4	3	0.9
Percent of students in school eligible for free or reduced-price lunches[2]										
Less than 25	72	3.2	76	3.4	50	4.2	19	3.7	35	4.1
25-49	48	4.5	58	3.8	37	3.1	12	2.8	17	3.2
50 or more	28	2.2	39	3.3	21	2.7	5	1.2	6	1.6

[1]Based on the percent of estimated schools that reported holding each type of event in 1995-96.

[2]Poverty status data were missing for about 3 percent of the sampled schools. These schools are not included in this analysis but are included in the total and in analyses with other school characteristics.

NOTE: s.e. is standard error.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8," FRSS 58, 1996.

One of the most striking differences in parent attendance at school-sponsored events was linked to the poverty status of the school. Poverty status was determined using the school reports of the percentage of enrolled students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, using the following categories: less than 25 percent (low), 25-49 percent (moderate), and 50 percent or more (high). In general, as the poverty status of the school increased, reports of high parent attendance decreased significantly. For example, while 72 percent of low-poverty schools reported that most or all parents attended the school open house, only 48 percent of schools with moderate poverty and 28 percent of high-poverty schools reported these high rates. Attendance at sports events was less markedly related to poverty status, where significant differences were found between low- and high-poverty schools (19 percent versus 5 percent), but not when either of these groups was compared with schools of moderate poverty.

Similar relationships were found when the percentage of minority students enrolled in the school was taken into account. Schools with low minority enrollments (less than 5 percent) reported significantly higher levels of parent attendance at all events when compared to schools with high minority enrollments (50 percent or more). However, minority composition of the school and its poverty status were highly related, with 87 percent of schools with high minority enrollments also categorized as high poverty schools (not shown in tables). Poverty status has also been shown to be related to the metropolitan status of the school, with urban children much more likely to be living in poverty than those in suburban locations (U.S. Department of Education 1996).

Parent Participation in School Decisionmaking

Schools often do not include parents in school decisionmaking. Overall, an average of about 40 percent of all schools reported that input from parents is considered to a small extent when making decisions on the issues addressed in this report, and on all but one issue, between 5 and 22 percent of schools reported that they do not consider parent input at all (table 3). Interestingly, schools appear to give input from parents the most consideration in the issue that has a direct impact on parents themselves--the development of parent involvement activities. Approximately one-third (31 percent) of all schools reported that parent input is considered to a great extent on this issue, and another 37 percent reported considering it to a moderate extent. At the other extreme, parents have little say in decisions regarding the monitoring and evaluating of teachers, with 74 percent of all schools indicating that parents have no say at all in this process. Also, approximately 20 percent of all schools indicated that parents have no say on decisions about the allocation of funds or library books and materials. For the remaining four issues (curriculum or instructional program, the design of special programs, discipline policies and procedures, and health-related topics or policies), fewer than 14 percent of schools reported considering parent input to a great extent, and between 34 and 38 percent of schools reported considering it to a moderate extent. There appeared to be no significant relationship between school characteristics and the extent to which schools considered parent input in decisionmaking.

Table 3.--Percent of public elementary schools (K-8) indicating the extent to which parent input is considered in making decisions on various school issues: 1996

Issue	Great extent		Moderate extent		Small extent		Not at all	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Allocation of funds	12	1.4	27	1.9	40	2.0	21	1.9
Curriculum or overall instructional program	9	1.3	38	2.3	44	2.7	9	1.2
The design of special programs	11	1.4	35	2.0	44	2.4	11	1.4
Library books and materials	6	1.2	26	1.9	47	2.4	22	1.6
Discipline policies and procedures	12	1.2	38	1.8	35	1.9	14	1.4
Health-related topics or policies, such as drug or alcohol abuse	13	1.7	34	1.8	39	2.0	14	1.4
Monitoring or evaluating teachers	1	0.4	4	0.8	21	1.8	74	1.7
Developing parent involvement activities	31	2.4	37	2.3	27	2.0	5	1.2

NOTE: s.e. is standard error. Because of rounding, percents may not add to 100.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8," FRSS 58, 1996.

Parent Input Through School Councils

The majority of public elementary schools (79 percent) reported that they have an advisory group or policy council that includes parents (table 4). Inclusion of parents in such an advisory group appears to be related to the size of the school and the percent of minority students enrolled in the school. Specifically, small schools are less likely than moderately sized or large schools to include parents on such councils, whereas schools with minority enrollments of 20 percent or more are more likely to include parents than are schools with minority enrollments of under 5 percent. Schools in the West are also more likely to include parents in an advisory group than are schools in the Northeast and Central regions of the country.

These data on advisory groups were used to determine whether a relationship existed between schools providing a formal group in which parents had more of a say in school matters, and the extent to which schools reported actually considering parent input in school decisionmaking. With the exception of decisions about monitoring or evaluating teachers, schools with advisory groups or policy councils that included parents were significantly more likely to consider parent input to a great or moderate extent when compared with schools without these kinds of groups (table 5).

Table 4.--Percent of public elementary schools (K-8) indicating presence of an advisory group or policy council that includes parents, by school characteristics: 1996

School characteristic	School has advisory group or policy council that includes parents	
	Yes	s.e.
All public elementary schools	79	2.1
Size of enrollment		
Less than 300	66	5.2
300-599	85	2.3
600 or more	83	2.4
Metropolitan status		
City	88	2.7
Urban fringe	80	4.2
Town	74	4.9
Rural	76	4.8
Geographic region		
Northeast	72	4.6
Southeast	83	3.1
Central	72	5.1
West	89	3.3
Percent minority enrollment in school		
Less than 5	70	3.9
5-19	76	4.5
20-49	86	3.3
50 or more	89	2.1
Percent of students in school eligible for free or reduced-price lunches[1]		
Less than 25	73	5.0
25 to 49	79	3.6
50 or more	84	2.2

NOTE: s.e. is standard error.

[1]Poverty status data were missing for about 3 percent of the sampled schools. These schools are not included in this analysis but are included in the total and in analyses with other school characteristics.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8," FRSS 58, 1996.

Table 5.--Percent of public elementary schools (K-8) indicating the extent to which parent input is considered in school decisionmaking, by inclusion of parents in an advisory group or policy council: 1996

Issue	Consideration of parent input							
	Great or moderate extent				Small extent or not at all			
	Parents on advisory groups		No parents on advisory groups		Parents on advisory groups		No parents on advisory groups	
	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.	Percent	s.e.
Allocation of funds	44	2.6	21	3.6	56	2.6	79	3.5
Curriculum or overall instructional program	53	2.5	22	4.0	47	2.5	78	4.0
The design of special programs	51	2.4	26	4.5	49	2.4	74	4.5
Library books and materials	35	1.9	17	4.4	65	1.9	83	4.4
Discipline policies and procedures	56	1.7	31	4.8	44	1.7	69	4.8
Health-related topics or policies, such as drug or alcohol abuse	49	2.2	37	4.9	51	2.2	63	4.9
Monitoring or evaluating teachers	6	0.9	3	1.8	94	0.8	97	1.8
Developing parent involvement activities	72	2.0	53	5.2	28	2.0	47	5.2

NOTE: s.e. is standard error.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Fast Response Survey System, "Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public Schools, K-8," FRSS 58, 1996.

Summary

Advocates for family-school partnerships in education believe that increasing family involvement will not only help to achieve the specific parent participation goal, but also will significantly help efforts to meet the other seven goals. These views are supported by research showing that when families and schools work together, students achieve higher academic performance. In the recently published *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (U.S. Department of Education 1994), the authors conclude that when parents are involved in their children's learning, the children earn higher grades and test scores, and they stay in school longer. The most significant ways that parents can influence this learning are through the attitudes, values, and materials found in the home environment. "Three factors over which parents exercise authority--student absenteeism, variety of reading materials in the home, and excessive television watching--explain nearly 90 percent of the differences in performance between high- and low-achieving states" (page 5). The authors also claim that when parents are involved in a variety of ways at school, the performance of all children in the school tends to improve.

Increasing family involvement in children's learning has become a special focus in all school reform efforts. In addition to the information presented in this report, The *Survey on Family and School Partnerships in Public School, K-8* gathered other data regarding the efforts elementary schools are making to actively engage parents and families in partnerships that support the academic work of children. School respondents provided information concerning school-to-home and home-to-school communication, volunteer opportunities for parents, the various resources schools make available to assist parents, the provision of information about school activities and student progress, and perceived barriers to parent involvement. These issues will be examined in a forthcoming analytical report, scheduled for release by the end of the year.

Technical Notes

The sample of elementary schools for the FRSS survey on parent involvement was selected from the 1993-94 NCES Common Core of Data (CCD) Public School Universe File. Over 84,000 public schools are contained in the CCD universe file, of which 60,000 are elementary schools. For this survey, elementary schools were defined as schools beginning with grade 6 or lower and having no grade higher than 8. Special education, alternative, schools not classified by grade span, and "combined" schools that house both elementary and secondary grades were excluded from the survey.

A stratified sample of 900 schools was selected from the elementary school frame. To select the sample, the frame of schools was stratified by poverty status, as determined by the percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Within these primary strata, schools were also sorted by enrollment size class and then by metropolitan status. The sample sizes were then allocated to the primary strata in rough proportion to the aggregate square root of the enrollment of schools in the stratum. The use of the square root of enrollment to determine the sample allocation is expected to be reasonably efficient for estimating school-level characteristics (e.g., number or percent of schools that include parents on an advisory group or policy council). Further, the proposed sample sizes were large enough to permit limited analysis of the questionnaire (along one dimension) by the four regions, by four metropolitan classes, and by three enrollment size categories.

In early April 1996 questionnaires were mailed to 900 elementary school principals. The principal was asked either to complete the questionnaire or to have it completed by the person in the school who was most knowledgeable about parent involvement in the school. Telephone followup of nonrespondents was initiated in late April, and data collection was completed in June 1996. Five schools were found to be ineligible, and a total of 810 schools completed the survey. Thus, the final response rate was 91 percent.

The response data were weighted to produce national estimates. The weights were designed to adjust for the variable probabilities of selection and differential nonresponse. The findings in this report are estimates based on the sample selected and, consequently, are subject to sampling variability. The standard error is a measure of the variability of estimates due to sampling. It indicates the variability of a sample estimate that would be obtained from all possible samples of a given design and size. Standard errors are used as a measure of the precision expected from a particular sample. If all possible samples were surveyed under similar conditions, intervals of 1.96 standard errors below to 1.96 standard errors above a particular statistic would include the true population parameter being estimated in about 95 percent of the samples. This is a 95 percent confidence interval. For example, the estimated percentage of public elementary schools reporting that they sponsored an open house is 97 percent, and the estimated standard error is 0.8 percent. The 95 percent confidence interval for the statistic extends from [97- (0.8 x 1.96) to 97 + (0.8 x 1.96)], or from 95.4 to 98.6. Estimates of standard errors for this report were computed using a technique known as the jackknife replication method. Standard errors for all of the estimates are presented in the tables. All specific statements of comparison made in this report have been tested for statistical significance using chi-square tests and t-tests adjusted for multiple comparisons using the Bonferroni adjustment, and they are significant at the 95 percent confidence level or better.

The survey estimates are also subject to nonsampling errors that can arise because of nonobservation (nonresponse or noncoverage) errors, errors of reporting, and errors made in collection of the data. These errors can sometimes bias the data. Nonsampling errors may include such problems as the differences in the respondents' interpretation of the meaning of the questions; memory effects; misrecording of

responses; incorrect editing, coding, and data entry; differences related to the particular time the survey was conducted; or errors in data preparation. While general sampling theory can be used in part to determine how to estimate the sampling variability of a statistic, nonsampling errors are not easy to measure and, for measurement purposes, usually require that an experiment be conducted as part of the data collection procedures or that data external to the study be used. To minimize the potential for nonsampling errors, the questionnaire was pretested with public school principals like those who completed the survey. During the design of the survey and the survey pretest, an effort was made to check for consistency of interpretation of questions and to eliminate ambiguous items. The questionnaire and instructions were extensively reviewed by the National Center for Education Statistics. Manual and machine editing of the questionnaire responses were conducted to check the data for accuracy and consistency. Cases with missing or inconsistent items were recontacted by telephone. Data were keyed with 100 percent verification.

The survey was performed under contract with Westat, Inc., using the NCES Fast Response Survey System (FRSS). Westat's Project Director was Elizabeth Farris, and the Survey Manager was Nancy Carey. Judi Carpenter was the NCES Project Officer. The data were requested by Oliver Moles, National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students, and Mary Rollefson of the National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education.

This report was reviewed by the following individuals:

Outside NCES

- Cindy Prince, National Education Goals Panel

Inside NCES

- Jonaki Bose, Surveys and Cooperative Systems Group
- Michael Cohen, Statistical Standards and Services Group
- Mary Frase, Data Development and Longitudinal Studies Group
- Edith McArthur, Data Development and Longitudinal Studies Group
- Laurence Ogle, Assessment Group
- William Sonnenberg, Data Development and Longitudinal Studies Group

For a copy of the questionnaire, *School Survey on Family and School Partnerships, K-8*, or for more information about the Fast Response Survey System, contact Judi Carpenter, Data Development and Longitudinal Studies Group, National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 555 New Jersey Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20208-5651, telephone (202) 219-1333. This and other NCES reports are available on Internet at www.ed.gov\nces\.

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